



## EduInspire-An International E-Journal

An International Peer Reviewed and Referred Journal (www.ctegujarat.org)  
 Council for Teacher Education Foundation (CTEF, Gujarat Chapter)  
 Patron: Prof. R. G. Kothari  
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### ENVISIONING UNESCO'S GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION THROUGH THE ETHOS OF ANCIENT INDIAN PHILOSOPHY VASUDHAIVA KUTUMBAKAM

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#### Introduction

In an increasingly interconnected yet fragmented world, education faces the urgent task of nurturing individuals who can think beyond borders, act responsibly, and uphold shared human values. UNESCO's Global Citizenship Education (GCED) emerges as a transformative educational framework aimed at preparing learners to engage constructively with global challenges such as inequality, conflict, environmental degradation, and cultural intolerance. While GCED provides a structured and policy-oriented approach to global learning, its ethical depth and moral grounding can be meaningfully enriched through indigenous philosophical traditions. One such profound civilizational idea is Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, an ancient Indian philosophical principle that envisions the entire world as one family. Rooted in the Upanishadic worldview, this ethos emphasizes interconnectedness, compassion, mutual responsibility, and harmony among all beings. This paper seeks to envision UNESCO's GCED through the ethos of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, arguing that this philosophical lens humanizes global citizenship education by grounding it in ethical universalism and shared humanity.

#### VASUDHAIVA KUTUMBAKAM

##### Scriptural Origins and Philosophical Context

The philosophical foundation of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam is found in the Maha Upanishad (Chapter 6, Verse 71), which states:

अयं बन्धुरयं नेति गणना लघुचेतसाम् ।

उदारचरितानां तु वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम् ॥

The verse gently critiques a narrow mindset that categorizes people as "one's own" and "others." Such distinctions, it suggests, arise from limited understanding. In contrast, those

with expanded consciousness—described as large-hearted or noble-minded—see the entire world as one family.

This teaching is firmly rooted in the broader framework of Ancient Indian Philosophy, which emphasizes the unity of Brahman (ultimate reality) and the presence of the same consciousness in all beings. From this perspective, separation is not absolute but experiential, while unity is fundamental and real.

### **The Philosophy of Oneness and Human Experience**

Ancient Indian Philosophy presents oneness not as a distant metaphysical abstraction but as a lived truth. Beneath the visible diversity of cultures, species, and forms lies a single, unifying cosmic principle. Humans, animals, plants, and even the elements of nature participate in this shared reality.

When understood humanly, this philosophy reshapes how individuals relate to the world. It encourages humility, reminding us that no being exists in isolation. Every action, thought, and choice reverberates through a larger web of life. Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam translates this insight into an ethical stance: if we are truly interconnected, then care for others is care for ourselves.

### **Redefining Family Beyond Blood and Borders**

In everyday life, the notion of family is usually limited to biological or social ties. Ancient Indian Philosophy invites a radical expansion of this idea. By viewing the world as a family, individuals are encouraged to extend the same concern, patience, and responsibility they show toward loved ones to strangers and even to non-human life.

This expanded understanding fosters a deep sense of belonging. It challenges fear of the “other” and replaces it with recognition. Differences of culture, religion, or nationality are no longer grounds for division but expressions of diversity within a shared human story.

### **Compassion and Empathy as Living Values**

At the heart of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam lies compassion. When people recognize that others share the same fundamental essence, empathy arises naturally. Suffering is no longer distant or abstract; it becomes personal and morally compelling.

This empathetic awareness encourages ethical action—helping those in need, standing against injustice, and working collectively for well-being. Compassion, in this sense, is the moral strength, rooted in the courage to acknowledge shared vulnerability and dignity.

**Healing Division and Cultivating Peace**

Modern societies continue to struggle with polarization and conflict. The philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam offers a healing perspective by shifting attention from difference to unity. It does not deny diversity but places it within a larger framework of shared existence. By fostering inclusivity and mutual respect, this worldview provides a philosophical basis for dialogue and peaceful coexistence. It encourages individuals and communities to move beyond narrow loyalties and work toward collective harmony.

**Environmental Ethics and the Living Earth**

The vision of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam extends naturally to the environment. Nature is not viewed as an external resource but as a member of the same cosmic family. Ancient Indian Philosophy treats the natural world with reverence, seeing it as a manifestation of the sacred. This perspective nurtures environmental ethics grounded in responsibility and care. Human well-being is inseparable from the health of ecosystems. When rivers, forests, animals, and the elements are treated with respect, balance is restored not only in nature but also in human life.

**Ecological Wisdom in Ancient Indian Philosophy**

Ancient Indian thought offers profound ecological insights that resonate strongly with contemporary concerns.

**Interconnectedness and Intrinsic Value**

All life forms are understood as interdependent, each possessing intrinsic value. This worldview discourages exploitation and encourages coexistence.

**Harmony with the Elements**

Human beings are described as microcosms of the universe, composed of earth, water, fire, air, and ether. Living harmoniously with these elements means aligning human actions with natural rhythms rather than dominating them.

**Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam and World Citizenship**

The idea of world citizenship is a practical expression of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam. A world citizen transcends boundaries of religion, race, gender, and nation, recognizing the dignity of all life. This involves developing awareness of oneness, cultivating a global perspective, and acting for universal well-being.

**UNESCO's GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION:****Background**

Over the past two centuries, the world has changed dramatically. Industrialisation, urbanisation, globalisation and rapid technological growth especially the digital revolution have transformed how we live, work and communicate. Yet progress has not eliminated suffering. Inequality is widening. Conflicts within countries have increased. Violence from war to domestic abuse and cyberbullying continues to affect millions. Mental health challenges are rising. Human rights violations, discrimination, racism and extremism persist. Climate change and environmental destruction threaten our shared future. These realities show that we need more than economic development, we need a shift from a culture of violence to a culture of peace, justice, compassion and sustainability.

**Transformative Education**

Education plays a powerful role in shaping this change. Transformative education helps learners reflect on who they are, how they relate to others, and how social, political and economic systems influence their lives. It encourages critical thinking and inspires action grounded in values such as peace, human rights, social justice, gender equality, intercultural respect and sustainability.

**The Emergence of Global Citizenship Education**

Traditional citizenship education often focuses only on national identity. Global Citizenship Education (GCED) expands this view, recognising that we live in an interconnected world.

UNESCO has been a leading force in promoting GCED worldwide. Since 2012, global momentum has grown through major education forums and the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Under SDG 4.7, countries committed to ensuring that learners gain the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, human rights, gender equality, peace and global citizenship.

**Why Global Citizenship Education?**

Citizenship traditionally involves rights, responsibilities and participation within a nation. However, globalisation, migration and shared global challenges such as climate change mean that national identity alone is no longer enough. We must learn not only to live together, but to act together.

GCED nurtures active, informed citizens who care about both local and global communities. It promotes engagement rather than passive acceptance and encourages responsibility

grounded in democracy, justice, diversity and sustainability. Importantly, GCED strengthens, not replaces national citizenship.

### **Global Challenges Require Global Action**

Today's world is deeply interconnected. Economic decisions, environmental issues and conflicts in one region affect others. While globalisation can foster cooperation, it can also increase inequality, exploitation and tension. Addressing global issues like climate change, migration, poverty and conflict requires shared responsibility and collective action.

### **Education and Global Citizenship**

Education must go beyond academic knowledge. It must develop values, communication skills and ethical awareness. Global citizenship is not a legal status, it is a sense of shared humanity and belonging to a global community. Global citizens understand global issues, respect diversity and actively contribute to building a more just and peaceful world.

### **What is Global Citizenship Education?**

UNESCO describes GCED as an approach to education that equips learners with the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes needed to create a just, peaceful, inclusive and sustainable world.

GCED aims to;

Develop responsible and active citizens at local, national and global levels

Promote intercultural understanding and respect

Build critical awareness of global and local challenges

Empower learners to take ethical and peaceful action

It is not only about understanding the world, it is about transforming it.

### **Pedagogical Principles and Strategies for Implementing GCED**

GCED should reflect its values in how it is taught.

Key principles include;

Human rights and social justice orientation

Participation and civic engagement

Critical inquiry

Dialogue and holistic understanding

Effective strategies include;

Integrating GCED across subjects rather than treating it as a separate topic.

Encouraging participatory, inquiry-based and experiential learning

Engaging families and communities

Promoting media literacy and critical thinking

Applying a whole-school approach

### **GCED Learning Domains and Competencies**

GCED develops three interconnected domains:

**Cognitive** – Knowledge and critical understanding of global issues

**Socio-emotional** – Empathy, respect, communication and intercultural skills

**Behavioural** – Responsible and ethical action

Competencies include critical thinking, collaboration, ethical responsibility, appreciation of diversity and active civic participation. The goal is to form informed, compassionate and engaged individuals who contribute to peace and sustainability.

### **UNESCO'S GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION THROUGH THE ETHOS OF VASUDHAIVA KUTUMBAKAM**

When UNESCO's GCED is envisioned through the ethos of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, its conceptual framework gains a deeper moral and emotional resonance.

#### **Cognitive Dimension: Knowledge with Wisdom**

While GCED's cognitive domain emphasizes global awareness and critical thinking, Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam adds a layer of wisdom by framing knowledge within the understanding of interconnectedness. Learning about global issues is no longer abstract but becomes personally meaningful when learners see themselves as part of a global family.

#### **Socio-Emotional Dimension: Empathy as a Moral Practice**

GCED's focus on empathy and solidarity aligns naturally with the ethos of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam. The idea of the world as one family nurtures emotional bonds across cultures and encourages learners to relate to the suffering and aspirations of others as their own.

#### **Behavioural Dimension: Responsible Action as Dharma**

GCED encourages active participation and responsible civic action. Through Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, such action is understood as Dharma—a moral duty towards the collective good. This transforms civic engagement from obligation into ethical commitment.

#### **Ethical Dimension: Values Rooted in Shared Humanity**

The ethical domain of GCED—justice, dignity, peace, and sustainability—finds a strong philosophical foundation in Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam. Ethical responsibility is not imposed externally but emerges organically from the recognition of shared humanity.

#### **Educational Implications**

Integrating the ethos of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam into GCED pedagogy can make global citizenship education more inclusive, culturally rooted, and value-driven. It allows education systems to draw upon indigenous knowledge traditions while addressing contemporary global

concerns. Such integration encourages learners to become not only globally competent but also morally conscious individuals.

### **Challenges and Reflections**

While Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam offers a universal vision, its integration into global education frameworks must be done thoughtfully, ensuring it complements rather than replaces existing GCED principles. Care must be taken to present it as an inclusive ethical philosophy rather than a culturally exclusive idea.

### **CONCLUSION**

Envisioning UNESCO's Global Citizenship Education through the ethos of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam offers a humanized and ethically grounded approach to global learning. By framing global citizenship as belonging to one world family, this philosophical lens deepens GCED's moral foundation and strengthens its transformative potential. In a world marked by division and uncertainty, such an integration can help educate learners who are not only globally informed but also compassionately engaged and ethically responsible.

